



Massachusetts Department of Public Health
Bureau of Substance Abuse Services
Massachusetts Tobacco Control Program

To order this and other brochures on alcohol, tobacco,
and other drugs, please go to www.maclearninghouse.com.

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Talking to your pre-teen about
alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs:
A 10-step guide for parents



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Step #1

Why you need to talk.

As a parent, you have a strong say over your pre-teens (kids 11-13 years old). Talking to them can help them make the right decisions about alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs. Many parents are surprised to learn that setting rules can strongly affect their kids' future.

When your children go to middle school, they face many new challenges. They want to try new things. They want to fit in. Their friends may pressure them to do things they may not feel so good about.

Remember, no matter how prepared you are for these talks, the chance to talk could happen when you don't expect it. Your child could start the talk at any time. So be ready to answer the questions when they ask them.

How to help your pre-teen stay away from alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs:

- *Talk about what they like to do and what could happen if they drink alcohol, smoke cigarettes, or take drugs. For example, they can't do as well in sports or could get into a car accident. They could get into trouble at school or with the police. They could get addicted to tobacco, alcohol, or another drug and not be able to quit.*
- *Talk to them about your family rules.*
- *Notice your pre-teens doing something right and congratulate them. It builds their confidence.*
- *Stay connected. Keep talking. Listen to your kids when they talk.*

Kids who learn a lot about the risks of drugs at home are up to 50 percent less likely to use drugs.¹

1. The Partnership for a Drug-Free America (www.drugfree.org) Partnership Attitudes Tracking Study (PATS) – Teens 2005

“I wanted to talk to my pre-teen about alcohol, smoking, and drugs, but I was afraid I'd say the wrong thing.”





Step #2

Get ready to talk.

You may be surprised what you can find out about your pre-teen!

Take this quiz and check the answers with your kids. It's fun and the information will be helpful in talks with your children.

How well do you know your pre-teens?

What are their favorite colors?

Who are their best friends?

What are the names of your kids' teachers?

Who are their favorite teachers?

Who are some of your kids' role models?

What do they admire about these people?

What are their favorite movies, TV shows, music or radio stations?

What are their favorite activities or hobbies?

What are their dreams for the future?

Adapted from Keeping Youth Drug Free, Center for Substance Abuse Prevention.

“I want to talk to my daughter about not smoking, but I don't know where to start.”



Step #3

Be prepared to answer questions about **your** smoking, drinking, or drug use.

What can I say if my children ask me if I ever used drugs?

Be honest — they will trust you more. Only share what you're comfortable sharing.

Some ways to answer

- *"We're talking about you, and I want to help you to be safe."*
- *"I've seen a lot of people get into trouble with alcohol and drugs, and I don't want to see you get hurt."*
- *"Everybody makes mistakes. I want to keep you from making a bad choice."*

What can I say or do if I drink or smoke now?

- *"When I started smoking, I didn't understand how hard it would be to quit. Maybe you can help me quit."*
- *"I'm an adult. It's against the law to drink if you are under 21."*
- *Be a good role model. Never talk about smoking, drinking, or drug use as something exciting or fun.*

Step #4

Know the facts before you start talking.

Your pre-teen may know more about drugs, tobacco, and alcohol than you do! Don't worry. You don't need to know everything.

Here are a few facts to get you started:

- Most pre-teens ***don't*** use alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs.
- The younger kids are when they start using alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs, the greater the chance that they'll get addicted and not be able to quit.
- Brain damage can happen when kids use alcohol, tobacco, and many other drugs.
- There are now more new users (12 years old and older) of prescription drugs than any other illegal drug — even marijuana. ²
- You may have lots of products in your home that could be used in illegal ways.

Find out more. Check out drug facts parents of pre-teens need to know on the inside back cover.

2. Colliver, J. D., Kroutil, L. A., Dai, L., & Gfroerer, J. C. (2006). Misuse of prescription drugs: Data from the 2002, 2003, and 2004 National Surveys on Drug Use and Health (DHHS Publication No. SMA 06-4192, Analytic Series A-28). Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Office of Applied Studies.



Step #5

Start the conversation.

Your children are listening to you — even when it looks like they aren't! What you say about choices they make can help them grow up healthy.

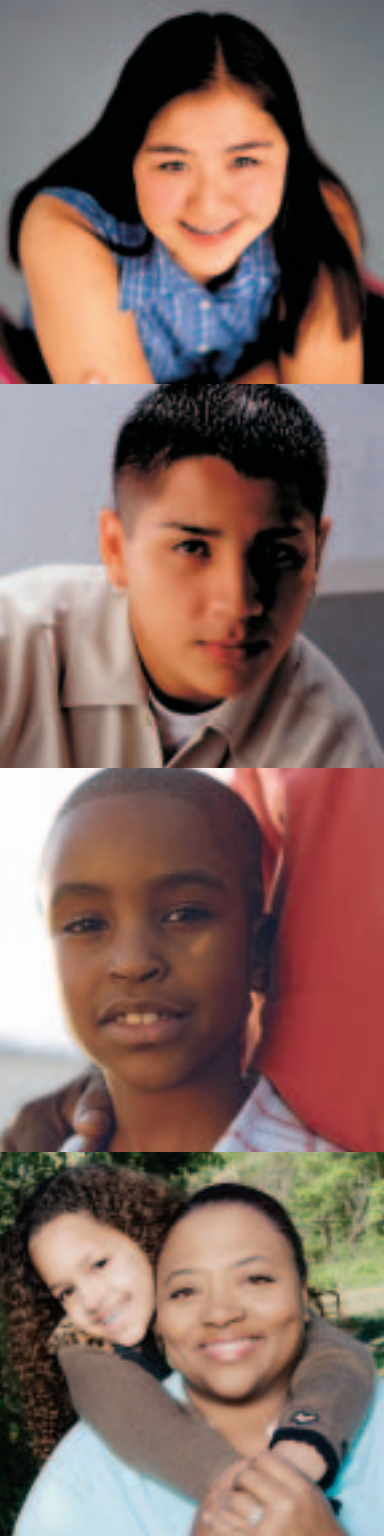
Here are some ways to get your kids talking to you about what's going on in their life:

- Ask your child what's going on — about friends and what's new and fun.
- Get your pre-teen to talk about feelings, such as how they feel about school, their friends, or how they feel about being a pre-teen.
- Ask questions so they know you're listening.
- Listen to your children and show them that what they say and think matters.
- Respect their answers even if you don't agree with them.
- Use what happens on radio or TV shows to start talking. For example, *"In that show we just watched, why do you think the boy or girl started to use drugs?"*
- *"I realize we haven't talked about alcohol or drugs. I love you and I want to be sure you're healthy. So our family needs to set some rules."*
- *"When I picked you up at school yesterday, I noticed some kids your age smoking. What do you think about that?"*
- *"I know most kids your age don't drink. I just want to talk with you about how important it is not to drive in a car with anyone who has been using drugs or drinking. Promise me you'll call me if you need a ride — any time."*

Talks can be short, but make it clear to your children what you expect from them. They need to know that you'll be checking in with them from time to time. Your kids will thank you, even if they don't say so for years.



"Whenever I talk to my pre-teen daughter, it seems like she tunes me out."



Step #6

Make family rules and keep them.

Rules to follow

- Make clear rules. Rules can include: when your children are expected home, what chores they have to do, etc.
- Write the rules down. Put them in a place where they can be seen.
- Consider rewards for following the rules, like a family trip or going to the mall.
- Give every rule a punishment if broken, like no phone calls or computer time for one week.
- Stick to the rules all the time.
- Go over the rules as your pre-teen gets older, and change the rules as your kids become more responsible.

Watch your children's activities

When you know what your pre-teens are doing, they are less likely to use alcohol, cigarettes, or other drugs.

Here are some tips and examples of rules to set:

- No riding in a car driven by a person who has been drinking alcohol or using drugs.
- No drinking of alcohol until you are 21 except for a sip of wine when you go to church or for other special religious reasons.
- No staying at parties where other teens are drinking or using drugs.
- No using illegal drugs, ever.
- No smoking ever, not even a puff.
- Stay away from places where others are smoking. Secondhand smoke is dangerous and can make kids sick.
- Talk with other parents about the rules you have set for your kids.
- Know where your children are and have a set time when your kids need to be home.
- Make a plan in case your pre-teen gets into a situation where alcohol or other drugs are being used.

Adapted from "The Rules of the House", www.sph.unc.edu/familymatters.

"My daughter always balked when I set rules, but she says now it helps her make good choices about not using alcohol or drugs."

Fitting in and pressure from friends

If their friends are drinking alcohol, smoking, or using drugs, your pre-teens might feel like they need to fit in. You can help your children build confidence by talking to them about how to say no. You can suggest your kids say:

- "No thanks. Let's go to my house and hang out."
- "Not now, I gotta go."
- "No! I'll get grounded."

Help them to come up with their own way to say no.

Congratulations! You are on your way to helping your kids stay alcohol, tobacco, and drug free.

Kids are less likely to use tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs if their parents have established a pattern of setting clear rules and consequences for breaking those rules. ³

3. Partnership for a Drug-Free America, www.drugfree.org.

Step #7

Keep your home safe from alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs.

Helpful hints:

- Think about keeping tobacco and alcohol locked up.
- Do not ask your pre-teen to handle your cigarettes or alcohol.
- Keep track of your prescription and over-the-counter drugs.
- Throw away old medicines.
- Watch your cleaning products, paint cans, hair spray, and nail polish remover — they can be poisonous. Watch your kids if they use these products.
- For information on abuse, prevention, and safer household products, go to www.inhalantabusetraining.org.





Step #8

Build your support system.

There are many people to turn to in your community who can support you as you talk with your pre-teen about alcohol, tobacco, and drugs:

- Family doctors, nurses, and faith leaders may have experience in talking to pre-teens and parents about alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs.
- School counselors and coaches can be helpful.
- Community health centers and anti-drug coalitions have information to share.

Other ways to keep your kids safer:

- Make sure your children's school has a strong anti-drug program.
- Start a neighborhood watch to report drug dealing or underage drinking.

The laws

Knowing some of the laws about using alcohol, tobacco, and drugs could help your pre-teen stay away from them. These laws have consequences. For example:

- Giving or selling tobacco to anyone under 18 is illegal.
- It's illegal for anyone under the age of 21 to have alcohol.
- Using marijuana or any other illegal drug is against the law.
- Using or even holding someone else's prescription is breaking the law.

For more information on Massachusetts laws, see www.mass.gov.

Step #9

Watch for warning signs.

Take this Quiz!

If you have seen some of these changes in your kids, they might be using alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs.

- Have you noticed a change in mood?
- Is your child sleeping or eating more or less than usual?
- Does your pre-teen show less interest in school, friends, or activities?
- Is the quality of schoolwork getting worse or is he or she skipping school?
- Does your pre-teen have new friends you haven't met?
- Is money missing, or have objects disappeared from the house?
- Is your child talking about parties where drugs and alcohol are being used?
- Is your pre-teen breaking rules and acting angry?

Some of these behaviors are normal for pre-teens. But if you think your child may be using illegal substances, have a calm and supportive talk with him or her and get help. Getting help early is the key to protecting your child's health. Addiction can be treated, and people recover.

See resources on page 20.



“I missed the warning signs. My daughter's only 12; I thought she was too young to be trying drugs.”

Step #10

Get help if you need it: Places for information.

Helplines and Hotlines in Massachusetts

Mass 211: Information and referrals for youth, cultural, and family services. 2-1-1 or 1-877-211-6277 or TTY: 617-536-5872; www.mass211help.org (toll-free; multi-lingual).

Try-To-STOP TOBACCO Resource Center of Massachusetts: For free help to quit smoking, call 1-800-Try-To-STOP (1-800-879-8678), or in Spanish 1-800-8-DEJALO (1-800-833-5256) or TTY: 1-800-TDD-1477 (1-800-833-1477); www.trytostop.org.

Massachusetts Substance Abuse Information and Education Helpline: Information on outpatient treatment referrals, 24 hours a day. Insurance is not needed. 1-800-327-5050 (toll-free; multi-lingual); TTY: 617-536-5872; www.helpline-online.com.

Institute for Health and Recovery: Referrals to residential services and information for youth and their families affected by alcohol or other drugs. 1-866-705-2807 (English and Spanish); www.healthrecovery.org.

Massachusetts and Rhode Island

Poison Control Center: Information and hotline about inhalants and other poisons. 1-800-222-1222 (toll-free; 24 hours); www.maripoisoncenter.com.

Massachusetts Resources

Massachusetts Department of Public Health, Bureau of Substance Abuse Services: Information on alcohol and other drugs and services. www.mass.gov/dph/bsas.

Massachusetts Department of Public Health, Tobacco Control Program: Information on tobacco. www.mass.gov/dph/mtcp.

Massachusetts Health Promotion Clearinghouse: Free information on alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs such as:

- *Be the First to Talk with your Pre-teen about Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drugs* (Spanish and Portuguese)
- *Choose to Keep Your Freedom* (English and Spanish)
- *Inhalants Poison Your Body* (English)
- *Preventing Substance Abuse Starts at Home: Safeguarding Your Children* (English and Spanish)
- *What You(th) Should Know about Tobacco* (English)

For copies of these brochures or more copies of this booklet, contact 1-800-952-6637 (toll-free; English, Spanish, and Portuguese) or TTY: 617-536-5872; www.maclclearinghouse.com.

National Resources

The Cool Spot: Interactive website for young teens. www.thecoolspot.gov.

National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA): Real stories, information, activities. www.nida.nih.gov/parent-teacher.html.

Family Matters: Information; step-by-step on-line guide for parents. www.sph.unc.edu/familymatters.

Facts every parent needs to know about alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs